

These are people who were told previously by our government that they could stay. They registered with our government, and now, with each and every day, more and more of them are losing their status. Just since I spoke about this issue on the Senate floor last week, an estimated 800 additional Dreamers have lost their DACA status. In March, the number of Dreamers with expiring protections will increase to 1,000 a day if we have not found a solution by that time.

This is an issue where we should be able to find bipartisan consensus. Americans want us to protect Dreamers. In fact, one recent poll found that 86 percent of Americans support action to allow Dreamers to stay in the United States. The Dream Act, which my colleague Senator DURBIN has led in the Senate for 16 years now, is based on a simple principle: Dreamers who are brought to the United States as children, and only know this country as their home, should be given the opportunity to contribute to our Nation and become citizens.

These young people were brought here through no fault of their own. On average, when they came over, they were only about 6½ years old. Imagine being told that you have to go back to a country you have not stepped foot in since you were 6, where you may not know anyone or even speak the language.

To receive DACA status, all Dreamers have already passed background checks, paid fees, and met educational requirements. They already did this so they could stay in the United States and contribute to our communities across the country.

Dreamers are already contributing. More than 97 percent of these Dreamers, of the DACA recipients, are now in school or in the workforce. In fact, 72 percent of them currently in school are pursuing a bachelor's degree or higher. The American Medical Association has urged us to take action on this issue, noting our current shortage of physicians in the United States—something the Presiding Officer is aware of—and estimating that passing the Dream Act could add 5,400 physicians to the U.S. healthcare system in the coming decades. According to the American Association of Medical Colleges, more than 100 students with DACA status applied to medical school last year, and about 70 Dreamers are currently enrolled in medical school.

In Minnesota, our large refugee and immigrant community has contributed so much to the cultural and economic vitality of our State. We are proud to have big communities of Somali, Liberian, and Oromo populations, as well as the second largest Hmong population. In fact, we have the biggest population of Somalis in the country, the biggest population of Liberians, the biggest population of Oromos, and we are also proud to be the home of more than 6,000 Dreamers.

Ending DACA in my State, where the unemployment rate is hovering in the

3-percent range, would cost Minnesota more than \$376 million in annual revenue, let alone the immeasurable impact to families who may be ripped apart.

REMEMBERING JOSEPH MEDINA

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, last week on the Senate floor, I talked about how I have always tried to find examples of Dreamers so that the citizens in my State can understand what we are talking about when we talk about the fact that someone could be brought over to our country and not even realize it and have this Dreamer status.

I talked about Joseph Medina. He was a decorated Army veteran. He served in World War II. He lived in Minnesota. I am sad to say that he passed away last July at the ripe old age of 103 years old. There was a story about Joe in today's edition of our largest newspaper in Minnesota, honoring his contributions to our Nation during World War II and through his nearly a century as a proud and hard-working Minnesotan.

Joe lost both of his parents before he was 1 year old. He was brought to the United States from Mexico by his aunt when he was just 5, and he didn't find out that he was undocumented during his whole time growing up. When did he find out? When he tried to join the Army in World War II.

So what he did then, because he wasn't a citizen—back then, it was pretty simple; what they would do is have people go to Canada, especially if they lived in Minnesota, and that is how they would become citizens. So they sent Joe Medina to Canada for 1 day. I remember his telling me this story—that this is what they did during World War II when they wanted people to sign up and serve. He stayed in a hotel for 1 night, and he came back, and with the help of our military, he became a citizen.

He then served under General MacArthur in the Pacific. Then he came home, got married, had a son, and that son served in the Vietnam war.

Joe came to Washington, DC, with his son for the first and last time to see the World War II Memorial at age 99. I stood there by his side as he looked at the Minnesota part of that Memorial and thought of the people he knew who were no longer with us and thought of his service and how much he loved serving our country in World War II.

At his side, along with his own son who had served in Vietnam, were two Dreamers—two high school students who were in high school in the suburban part of the Twin Cities, and they also wanted to join the military. If I remember right, they wanted to join the Air Force. Do you know what? The way the rules were a few years ago, they weren't allowed to do that. Joseph Medina couldn't understand that because the proudest part of his life was serving in our military, serving despite

the fact that he was born in another country but lived almost his entire life—98 years of his 103 years—in America.

So I join with all those in my State in remembering Joseph Medina and honoring his service to our country as we continue to work toward finding a solution for the Dreamers in the Senate.

I note that we should also take action here at the end of the year, and we should be staying to get a number of priorities done, including a long-term reauthorization of the Children's Health Insurance Program, dealing with the medical device tax, renewing funding for community health centers. There are so many things we need to do.

In closing, I just want to make clear that I stand with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle who have spoken out in support of the Dream Act. We need to pass this bill.

Thank you.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. RUBIO. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

A RECAP OF THE YEAR AND AN OUTLINE OF THE CHALLENGES OF THE YEAR AHEAD

Mr. RUBIO. Mr. President, as I try to do every year, if time permits—this will be my seventh year in the U.S. Senate; sometimes our work here finishes in a different fashion, but if possible, I try to come on the last day of the legislative year and give a speech to kind of recap the year behind us and outline the challenges of the year ahead.

For me, it was, obviously, an eventful year, a productive one, and I believe it has been one for this Chamber, as well, in what is a unique political environment in which politics today is practiced and covered in ways we have never seen before—almost like entertainment. Nevertheless, it was a year that we got a lot of good things done, and I wanted to highlight some of them in the hope that this gives us momentum into the new year.

This has been my first experience with a new President—obviously, not just a new President but a new administration that brought with it a set of individuals in different positions, so I think for all of us it was a transition in that regard. It also was the beginning of a second term, which, at one time, I didn't know I was even going to pursue.

In arriving here earlier this year and getting to work, we slowly but surely got going on a number of key priorities that we had been working on for a very long time. The first one that happened

was the VA accountability bill. This was a bill that I had been working on for a number of years. It basically gave the Secretary of the VA the power to fire people at the VA who are not doing a good job. It is that simple. It is not anything more complicated than that. It made it easier to fire people who were not doing a good job. They still have due process to defend themselves.

For the better part of 3 years, there were a lot of objections to that proposal from the previous administration and some of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle. Then everything lined up this year. Senator TESTER and Senator ISAKSON, who are the ranking member and chairman of that committee, came onboard and really helped to push this and to move it forward. It passed in both Chambers and was signed into law by the President. This was a substantial achievement.

What is interesting about it is that because it was bipartisan, because there was cooperation, and because no one was fighting with anyone on it, it didn't get a lot of press coverage. But it happened, and people need to know about it.

Does it make the VA perfect? No. Are there still challenges that need to be confronted? Absolutely. This is something that has to do with accountability and the ability to get rid of people who were not doing a good job. It is something that, for years, could not get done because someone always objected and found a way to stop it. Then it came together with people working across the aisle to make it happen. Today, it is the law. Today, there are people who were not doing a good job who are no longer employed at the VA, thanks to this. That is an important thing that people need to know.

I always remind everyone that the overwhelming majority of people who work at the VA are doing a good job. The ones who are not are the ones we need to replace.

The year went on, and I had an opportunity to interface and interact with the National Security Council and with the White House on two foreign policy issues that didn't really require legislation but that I am grateful and excited about having the opportunity to help craft.

The first was the new direction on U.S. policy toward Cuba. The previous administration had basically changed our policies toward Cuba—opened it up to much fanfare and, quite frankly, a lot of editorial board excitement.

It was the enlightened position, apparently, to argue that doing more trade with Cuba was going to somehow help Cuba transition to a democracy. But after 2½ years, it has become apparent that this change has done nothing other than flow more dollars into the hands of that regime and help them in their efforts to normalize.

When President Trump was elected, one of the things he wanted to talk about was what we needed to do to change that relationship back to some-

thing that favored the Cuban people and not the Cuban regime. Those changes came about. They were announced earlier this year at an event in South Florida.

To cut to the chase, what it does is this: It says that people can still travel to Cuba. Americans can still go to Cuba as part of a group or as an individual going to support the Cuban people. But if you go to Cuba, whether off a cruise ship, an airplane, or if you are there in support of the Cuban people, you have to spend your money at places that are owned by Cubans—by everyday Cuban people—not by the Cuban military, which is trying to create a monopoly.

For the first time in the history of that tyranny, there is a U.S. policy that places individuals in Cuba—private individuals in Cuba—in a favored position in comparison to the military and the Castro government. I believe this law will slowly but surely pay dividends as it becomes abundantly clear to the small, independent, private sector in Cuba that the reason they are aren't growing—the reason they aren't attracting more customers—has nothing to do with U.S. policy. It is because their own government does not want to allow them to be able to grow their businesses.

The Cuban Government feels threatened by private business, No. 1, because they are Communists and, No. 2, because they don't want people in Cuba to be able to support themselves. They want people to be dependent upon them; that is how they control politically.

We will see what decision the Cuban Government makes in the months and years to come, but here it is abundantly clear that there are people—Americans—who, under our law, can travel to Cuba, can spend money in Cuba, and they will have to stay at an Airbnb or in a private home or even, if the Cuban Government allows it, a hotel that is owned by a private entity. Where they cannot stay is in places controlled by the Cuban military or companies controlled by the Cuban military.

The second foreign policy issue that we were able to get involved in is another tragedy in our hemisphere; that is, what is happening in Venezuela. To cut to the chase, we have a tyrant who is afraid that he won't get reelected. He lost control of the National Assembly, which is their legislative body. His name is Nicolas Maduro. So what does he do? He basically figures out a way to create an alternative Congress called the Constituent Assembly, basically modeled after the fraudulent Cuban constituent assembly-like model. What it basically does is it guarantees that certain sectors in society have seats of representation. Instead of seats in Congress by a district or state, they are represented by different sectors, like labor, electricians, you name it.

But here is the funny part about it: The only people who can run for it are

the people they allow to run for it, and they also get to count the votes. As you can imagine, that fraudulent Constituent Assembly basically votes 100 percent in favor of whatever he wants, literally with very little dissent. It is not democratically elected. Meanwhile, the legitimate, democratically elected Congress, to use terms that we use here, has basically been intimidated and stripped of their power. Maduro doesn't allow them to be paid anymore; they don't staff anymore; all sorts of things of that nature.

We encourage the President of the United States to pursue first individual sanctions. We encourage the President to grow the list of individuals in Venezuela who are sanctioned and no longer able to benefit from ill-found gains here in the United States and ultimately to prevent them from continuing to do something they have been doing for far too long.

For far too long, they have been stealing the oil from Venezuela. They are selling it in global markets at a discount. Then they use those—to use rough numbers, they take \$1 million worth of oil and sell it for half a million dollars. Then they will take some of that half a million dollars and use it to pay the interest on the debt they already owe. Then the rest of that cash, they use for themselves, and they sprinkle a little bit of it to some of the elites around them just to keep them loyal to the regime. Those are the mid-level or high-level military officials who decide, well, things aren't great in Venezuela, but at least my family is better off than everybody else because we are loyal to the regime.

The President moved to stop that. Today, U.S. entities can no longer trade in these fraudulent, illegal bonds that are stolen from the people of Venezuela. This is a tragic situation. This is not an embargo. This is not economic warfare, which is what Maduro calls it. This, basically, is preventing them from continuing to steal.

I would add one more point to this. I encourage every one of you, if you can, to read an article in the New York Times that appeared last weekend, a pretty extensive series on starvation. Children are literally starving to death in Venezuela. Venezuela is the richest country in the hemisphere, the richest country in South America, in terms of being one of the most oil-rich countries in the world. Venezuela is a nation with a long history of stable economics and even the longest democratic tradition in South America. There are children starving. We see images that we normally associate with other continents at other times in our history—children starving to death in Venezuela. Meanwhile, he looks as though he weighs more than he ever has before, and all the people who surround him in his government are heavier, fatter than they have ever been before. People are starving because of that. It is not because of U.S. policy. It is not because of sanctions. There is no one in

the world, other than his handful of cronies, who would argue that it has anything to do with sanctions. It is because of them, because in addition to being incompetent, they are criminals.

The Venezuelan Government, from the top down and everywhere in between, is filled with narcotraffickers, with people who allow narcotraffickers from Mexico and from Colombia to fly into and use airports in Venezuela to traffic drugs. Just imagine for a moment, in this country, if our elected officials said to certain drug dealers: If you pay us, not only will the DEA not stop you from trafficking in drugs, but they will help you move it. That is what happens in Venezuela. Imagine for a moment if the Department of Defense went to drug dealers and said: If you pay us, not only will we allow your planes to fly, we will tell you what time to take off and we will escort you in our airspace. That is Venezuela—state-sponsored narcotrafficking at every level.

By the way, they offer another service. If you don't pay them, they will tell you: Don't worry, we will arrest the rival drug dealer, but we will protect the ones who pay us.

There are some very wealthy people in that government. In addition to corruption and stealing from the people of Venezuela, they are narcotraffickers. The Vice President of Venezuela is a narcotrafficker, sanctioned by the United States as a drug kingpin, and it goes on from there. The Vice President of the party, who controls their intelligence services—a thug by the name of Diosdado Cabello—is a drug trafficker. The nephews of the President of Venezuela, the nephews of his wife, the First Lady, were just convicted and sentenced last week, in a court in New York, for drug trafficking. By the way, in their testimony, it is all filled with evidence.

I hope in the new year that we can find a way to continue to support the brave people of Venezuela and a better way forward. We would hope, by the way, that even in the Venezuelan Government, even in that fraudulent Constituent Assembly, we would hope that there are people there, like Hugo Chavez, who believed in the stuff he believed in—but they would have to see that this is a disaster, that this incompetent man is destroying their country and starving their children, and that there is no future in the direction they are headed. We hope this situation improves in the years to come.

Senator CARDIN was on the floor yesterday discussing this, and I want to reiterate that I hope that early next year, we can move on a bill that we introduced together called the Venezuelan Humanitarian Assistance and Defense of Democratic Governance Act of 2017. This helps address this problem. It puts in place a plan to help with this humanitarian crisis. We need a government that allows us to do it. But knowing that the United States, working with Canada, Mexico, Argentina,

Colombia, Peru, Brazil, Spain, and the European Union—knowing that these countries are ready to step in and help might be an incentive for decent people still left in that government to step forward and begin a process of transition.

It was an interesting year, and one more legislative initiative that we took on was the RACE for Children. It is a pediatric cancer initiative. There are not enough innovations in pediatric cancer when you compare it to adult cancer. This law requires pharmaceuticals to begin testing adult drugs on pediatric populations so that hopefully we can develop more pediatric medicines. I worked on that with Senator BENNET of Colorado. We got it passed and signed into law. Again, it is not something that got a lot of attention because it was bipartisan and not controversial, but it is important. We are proud of the good work we accomplished this year in that regard.

We had hurricanes that impacted Florida not once but twice, first Hurricane Irma and then Hurricane Maria, which struck Puerto Rico and had an impact on Florida as well. Approximately 200,000 U.S. citizens from Puerto Rico have moved to Florida because there is no electricity, because the island had already been hit previously, and because it is facing a financial disaster, and now it got hit by the storm. We were very involved in helping there. In particular, we worked with Resident Commissioner Jenniffer Gonzalez, who is a true and dedicated public servant to the people of Puerto Rico, No. 1, in getting the right response. It took a little too long for the response to get going, but it finally started moving. But there is still so much to be done. The estimates are that it will be another 8 months before power is restored.

A disaster like that is never good news, but for the first time at least in 7 years, I feel as though my colleagues know more about Puerto Rico than ever before. They understand the challenges it faces because of its unique status. They understand the pre-existing challenges it faced before the storm, and they understand what lies ahead.

I don't mean this disrespectfully, but there was a time when people sometimes would talk to me about Puerto Rico as though it were a foreign country. We have to remind them that these are U.S. citizens. On a per capita basis, they volunteer to serve in the Armed Forces as much as or more than anyone else in the United States.

I hope that in the year to come we will redouble our efforts, particularly in disaster relief, to ensure that Puerto Rico doesn't just recover but is rebuilt stronger than ever so that we don't have to continue to revisit this in the future when the inevitable happens, because they will face a storm again.

Of course, just a few days ago, we passed tax reform. Not everybody likes it, but I think more people will as they

start to see its true implications. By March of this year, the overwhelming majority of Americans are going to notice that their paychecks are bigger than they were a year ago, and if they didn't get a raise, it will be solely based on tax reform. If I were king for a day, the law would look a little different. But we don't have kings in America; we have a constitutional republic in which making things better is our goal. Sometimes if you get 70 or 80 percent of what you want, that is certainly a victory. Sometimes if you get 50 percent of what you want, that is a victory. Most change in America happens incrementally through our constitutional republic. Every now and then, we can take major steps forward.

Here is the bottom line: America's Tax Code today is better than it was before this bill passed. Do I think we went a little too far in the direction of multinational corporations? Perhaps—not that it is going to hurt the economy. But I thought some of that could have been geared toward working families through a further expansion of the child tax credit. But over all, I do believe it will help grow our economy, and more importantly, I do believe it will leave more money in the hands of Americans to be able to spend it on their families. It is their money. It is not ours.

The best way to look at it is, if I came here and said that I wanted to spend \$2 trillion over the next 10 years—borrowed money—to give it to the government so the government could stimulate the economy, there would be a lot of support from the other side of the aisle and from the press. They would call it genius and enlightened for a Republican to think that way. But if we say we want to leave \$1.5 to \$2 trillion in the hands of the American people and the private sector so they can stimulate the economy instead, it is a disaster and it is irresponsible. It is just a philosophical difference of opinion.

There is a role for government. We must fund it. We have to rebuild our military. We talked about disaster relief. There are important things for government to do. But by and large, a dollar spent by the private sector or by an individual family is going to generate more growth than a dollar spent by the government. We fund government not to grow the economy but to help sustain it and protect it and keep us safe and the food that we eat and the airplanes we travel on and certainly from threats foreign and domestic. Economic growth is a function of the private sector and of individuals, and tax reform helps to achieve it. That alone won't be enough.

One of the singular challenges in America today that we must confront in the new year, hopefully, is the skills gap. It is not just a throwaway phrase; it is the fact that the best paying jobs, the ones that actually pay enough to raise a family and save for retirement—those jobs require skills that

our schools aren't teaching. Those jobs require skills that millions of Americans do not have. We have to change that. We have to make it easier not just to graduate people at 18 years of age ready to work, we have to make it easier for people at 45 to be able to go back to some sort of school and acquire the skills they need for a better paying job. That will lead to economic growth. That will help fill the 2 million to 3 million unfilled jobs that we cannot find people in this country with the right skills to fill. That is how people get a raise as a part of economic growth, and I hope the new year provides an opportunity for that.

I would add that, in addition to that, the new year will provide us an opportunity to focus on infrastructure, which is critical. My State of Florida is particularly impacted by not just storms but sea level rise in coastal areas, and there are things we can do to mitigate against it. We need to restore the Everglades, and, of course, we need roads and bridges and to improve our infrastructure and airports. Hopefully, we can confront that as we work on infrastructure.

Mr. President, 2018 will be a year that we will deal with the farm bill. I hope action will be taken to reform crop insurance, to ensure that my State's farmers are never in the position they were put in after Hurricane Irma, with neither a reliable safety net, nor a reliable commitment from the Federal Government to step in when Federal programs fail to meet disaster needs.

Next year could be a water resources year, a water year. Again, it is an opportunity for us to do critical things for our infrastructure. In Florida, beach renourishment and intercoastal navigation projects are important not just to our way of life but to our tourism industry. There are harbor dredging projects with the expansion of the Panama Canal. It is important that these things get done next year. They won't get as much controversy or fanfare, but these are critical things that we can do.

Another opportunity next year that we have heard some talk about is the ability to reform the social safety net. On that front, I would say that is an issue that I have pushed for for a very long time. But sometimes when you talk about reform, people think you are coming at it because you want to cut. For me, it is not so much about cutting; it is about improving the way we deliver the same services. How can we use the money we are already spending in the safety net but in a better way?

I believe in the safety net. I actually don't believe free enterprise works unless we have one. People are not going to take risks, people are not going to strive if they think that if they fail, the consequences will be economic devastation. You have to have a safety net to take care of those who cannot take care of themselves—the permanently

disabled, the elderly and the like—but you also have to have a safety net for people who have come upon tough times until they can get back on their feet and try again.

But I fear—in fact, I realized long ago—that our safety net programs treat the symptoms of poverty, but they do not cure it. That is why I hope that if and when we tackle the social safety net—and I hope we will in 2018—it will not be so much about cutting as it will be about reorganizing and improving. Yes, we will take care of people in their emergent and immediate needs. But we will also make it easier for you to go back to school and get a degree or a technical certification so that you can find a job and never again rely on the government. If we do that for enough people, it will save us money because fewer people will be on the social safety net. But that should not be the reason we tackle it—not as a cost-saving exercise, but as a way to lift up more Americans.

We are in a global competition, and our chief geopolitical competitor in the economic space in the 21st century will be China. China has over three times as many people as we do, and we have to compete against them. They have 1 billion, and we have 380 million or 400 million people. We are competing against an economy with three times as many people. We need everyone. We are not a nation that can afford economically to leave anyone behind, and we are a nation in which leaving anyone behind would be a betrayal of our founding principles. That is why I hope we will tackle it next year—if we tackle the social safety net—with job training programs.

In a few moments, the Senate will hopefully take up and vote on the continuing resolution. I know everyone is anxious to return to their States and homes for the holiday. I will say that I am disappointed we are leaving here at the end of this year not having taken on a disaster relief bill that I know the people in Florida, Texas, Puerto Rico, and—with the wildfires—out West need. I believe we will confront it in the early part of next year, along with a permanent extension of the Children's Health Insurance Program and other matters.

Next year will bring an opportunity, as well, to deal with things like immigration security, the opportunity to deal with young people brought to this country, through no fault of their own, by their parents who now find themselves here, illegally, in the country. I believe there is a real chance next year to provide them certainty and the ability to stay in this country for the future.

All these things are there, and they will happen in the early part of the year. But, at least when it comes to disaster relief, it is disappointing that we won't be able to do that—largely for legislative strategic reasons, not for policy ones. But I am confident we will deal with it in the early part of next year.

I actually think that in 2018, despite it being an election year, if we allow the momentum that closed out this year to carry over to the new one, we will have a chance to do good things for our country.

In the end, given our differences that exist in this country today, it is hard to imagine we will ever always agree that every idea is a good one, but I hope we can all agree that our job here is to make things better. Sometimes making things better means 1 step forward, and sometimes it means 50 steps forward. But as long as we are moving forward in a pattern of perpetual improvement, I think we should be proud of the work we are doing.

I think, by and large, in 2017, despite the fits and starts, despite the controversies, despite the headlines every morning about the outrage of the day or questions in the afternoon that usually begin with "How did you feel about the tweet on this or on that?"—despite all those distractions, I think 2017 will go down as a year of consequential improvement, where things happened in this Chamber and in this city that made America better, not worse. On that, I hope we can continue to work.

I wish all the people of Florida, all my colleagues, all the people of this great country and around the world a happy Hanukkah, a merry Christmas, and a happy New Year. I look forward to working together and making things better in the year to come.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

REPUBLICAN TAX BILL

Mr. REED. Mr. President, yesterday, we saw a very unusual celebration at the White House as Members of Congress took turns exalting the President and speaking in glowing terms about the tax bill they had passed. There appeared to be quite a contrast between the celebration at the White House and the reaction by working Americans.

Why weren't working middle-class Americans celebrating so vigorously? Why does poll after poll find that this is the most unpopular tax bill since the 1980s, in fact, including tax hikes by Presidents George Herbert Walker Bush and President Bill Clinton? This bill is even less popular than those tax increases.

Speaker RYAN seems to think the Republican tax bill is unpopular because Americans don't know what is in it. He is wrong. The American people are smart. They get it. They don't like this tax bill because they do know what is in it: lots of goodies for President Trump and his family and very little for theirs.

This tax bill isn't popular with working people because they know that if Republicans really wanted to give them a tax break, Republicans would have given it to them directly and not to corporate executives. Middle-class